

## Message Text

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66

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-05 FEA-01 PA-02 PRS-01 USIA-15

COME-00 INT-05 /042 W

----- 066828

R 071049Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY LISBON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1969

INFO SMITHSONIAN OBSERVATORY CAMBRIDGE MASS

AMCONSUL OPORTO

UNCLAS LISBON 1254

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SENV, EGEN, PFOR, PO

SUBJ: OPORTO OIL TANKER DISASTER

REF: (A) LISBON 940; (B) STATE 048174

1. EMBASSY'S ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN TO ASSOCIATED PRESS REPORT ON SUBJECT DISASTER, DATELINED FEB. 22 UNDER BYLINE OF DONALD SANDERS. REPORT APPARENTLY BASED ON OUR MESSAGE TO SMITHSONIAN (REF A), WHICH ITSELF WAS IN REPLY TO REQUEST FROM SMITHSONIAN FOR INFO ON DISASTER.

2. AP DESPATCH DIFFERS FROM REF. A IN THREE MINOR ASPECTS: IT ALLEGES TANKER CAPTAIN WAS AMONG CASUALTIES, THAT VESSEL WAS DESTROYED BY "FOUR" EXPLOSIONS, AND THAT INFO ARRIVED AT SMITHSONIAN VIA CABLE FROM FR. HERCULANO VILELA, (GOP) NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR FISHERIES. EMBASSY HAS VERIFIED WITH DR. VILELA THAT HE HAS HAD NO DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH SMITHSONIAN, THAT ONLY INFO FORWARDED WAS THROUGH EMBASSY IN REF. A.

3. WE DO NOT OBJECT TO AP ACCOUNT BECAUSE OF ABOVE INACCURACIES. OUR CONCERN, FOR WHICH WE HAVE APOLOGIZED TO GOP AUTHORITIES, IS THAT INFO WHICH THEY FURNISHED IN GOOD FAITH IN RESPONSE TO INQUIRY FROM RESPONSIBLE US SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED TO US AUDIENCE IN MANNER POTENTIALLY INJURIOUS

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TO PORTUGUESE ECONOMIC INTERESTS. IMPRESSION LEFT BY ACCOUNT'S

HEADLINE ("BIG OIL SPILL DESPOILING PORTUGAL'S COAST"--NYTIMES, FEB. 23; "PORTUGAL COASTLINE SPOILED" --PORTLAND OREGONIAN, FEB. 23) AND FIRST PARA. ("WHAT MAY PROVE TO BE HISTORY'S SECOND LARGEST OIL SPILL...HAS ALREADY DESPOILED 20 MILES OF PORTUGAL'S COASTLINE AND MAY SPREAD FURTHER") LEAVE IMPRESSION WHICH IS FALSE. ON BASIS CONTACTS WITH DR. VILELA, THE PORTUGUESE COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT, AND AMCONSUL OPORTO, WE CAN ESTABLISH OR CONFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

(A) ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO QUANTIFY THE AMOUNT OF SPILLED OIL POLLUTING COAST AREAS, IT IS CLEAR (AS STATED REF A) THAT "MAJAO PORTION" OF TANKER'S CARGO BURNED AND ONLY "SOME" OIL FROM SUBMERGED TANKS LEAKED OUT TO DAMAGE ADJACENT COAST.

(B) NO MORE OIL IS SEEPING FROM SUBMERGED TANKER.

(C) PORTIONS OF COASTLINE AFFECTED BY POLLUTION HAVE BEEN CLEANED UP, BY VOLUNTEER LABOR, AND NEITHER RESIDUE NOR ODORS REMAIN. (AMCONSUL OPORTO REPORTS THAT VIRTUALLY ONLY VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF DISASTER IS VESSEL'S PROW, STICKING OUT OF THE WATER A SHORT DISTANCE OFFSHORE.)

4. EMBASSY HAS BEEN CONTACTED BY REPORTERS FOR TIME AND NBC. THEIR IMPRESSION, GAINED FROM AP STORY, WAS THAT POLLUTION ASPECT OF DISASTER WAS OF A MAGNITUDE EXCEEDED (IN WORDS OF STORY) "ONLY BY THE 1967 TORREY CANYON DISASTER." WE HAVE CLARIFIED ALONG LINES PARA. 3 ABOVE AND EMPHASIZED THAT ZONE INVOLVED IS VERY SMALL PORTION OF PORTUGUESE COAST AND GEOGRAPHICALLY FAR REMOVED FROM TOURIST BEACHES OF THE ALGARVE.

5. EMBASSY WISHES TO POINT OUT CONSEQUENCES FOR PORTUGUESE TOURIST INDUSTRY, AND CONSEQUENTLY ENTIRE PORTUGUESE ECONOMY, INHERENT IN SENSATIONALIZING OF THIS ONE EVENT. ASIDE FROM GENERAL WORLDWIDE DECLINE IN TOURISM, PORTUGAL SUFFERED LAST SEASON FROM LOCAL CHOLERA SCARE AND RUMORS OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY SET OFF BY APRIL 25 REVOLUTION. THE LAST THING PORTUGAL NEEDS IS TO HAVE POTENTIAL 1975 SEASON TOURISTS (OR TRAVEL AGENTS) DETERRED FROM VISITS TO THIS COUNTRY BECAUSE OF MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THAT ITS COASTLINE HAS BEEN "SPOILED."

6. IN VIEW OF CIRCUMSTANCES, OFFER EXTENDED BY  
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US FIRM (REF B) IS APPRECIATED BUT UNNECESSARY.  
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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** WATER POLLUTION, CARGO SHIPS, SHIP ACCIDENTS, OIL SPILLS  
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**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 07 MAR 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
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**Reference:** 75 LISBON 940, 75 STATE 048174  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** buchant0  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 29 MAY 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <29 MAY 2003 by RuthemTJ>; APPROVED <25 FEB 2004 by buchant0>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
05 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
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**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** OPORTO OIL TANKER DISASTER  
**TAGS:** SENV, EGEN, PFOR, PO, (VILELA, HERCULANO)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006